Orient Longman

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Tales of Ancient India

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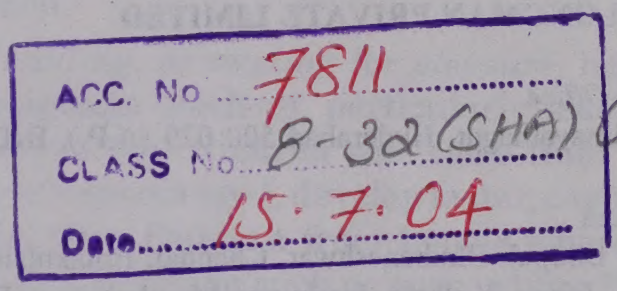
ORIENT LONGMAN EASY READERS

LEVEL 3

Tales of Ancient India

Shanta Rameshwar Rao

Simplified and abridged by
K. RADHA



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Tales of Ancient India

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A word about readers and reading

Childhood is a time of enchantment as well as innocence. The child's eye transforms even mundane incidents and objects into the contours of a magical landscape; and perhaps the most potent magic of all is created by the miracle of *reading*. Once the child has discovered the intoxication of reading, life cannot remain the same; in fact, this may be the only relic of one's lost childhood that the adult is able to retain to the end, for it allows constant renewal.

It is sad that today media threaten one of the great comforts and privileges of a civilised society—the joy of reading a book. For nothing, no advance in technology, can quite replace the printed book. The child's imagination provides the script, helped by a little 'cueing' from an understanding writer, for the most fantastic as well as moving tales ever created. It is precisely because the book enables the child to unlock the treasure-chest of her or his own imagination that it scores so easily over a predominantly visual medium such as television.

The value of *extensive reading*, or *reading for pleasure*, has been widely recognised by language teachers, particularly teachers of English. It has been proved that children who come from homes where habits of reading are encouraged, develop faster, cognitively as well as linguistically, than children from homes where little reading is done. In fact, in a situation such as ours, where English is only a second language, with restricted use within the community, it is *reading* that can contribute most to successful language learning. Of the many millions of Indian children who spend painful years at school trying to master this language, relatively few succeed; and it can be demonstrated that those who do are the ones who have taught themselves to *read*—independently and widely, and with understanding and pleasure.

It may be said that, on the whole, the teaching of English does not adequately support or foster habits of extensive reading. Very many children read only the prescribed 'reader'. While the textbook, properly used, can be instrumental in the development of many essential *skills* of reading, there are other important skills which can be developed only through extensive (rather than intensive) reading, such as the skill of reading fast in order to acquire an overall understanding of a text. The language learner needs exposure to a wider variety of text types than can be provided through a single prescribed 'reader'. It is also important that learners should be trained to do *sustained* reading, which means

reading through a *full-length* book (no matter how short) rather than a truncated excerpt.

The purpose in introducing extensive reading is to encourage children to read *widely* and *independently*, without having to depend on the teacher's help. Ideally, we should expect a child to read at least four to six books a year. The secret of success in reading is to develop the confidence that the learner *can* read independently. It is possible, however, that many children may not be able to or be willing at first to undertake the effort required and will require guidance by teachers. However, help should be offered, if at all, only as a form of *transition*, with the aim of gradually reducing the learner's dependence on the teacher.

In many schools in our country as well as abroad, every classroom has a *reading corner*, where selected children's books are attractively displayed. Several times a week, there is a *reading hour*, when children are free to pick up any book they like and read without interference. Some of the acronyms created for such activities are USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) and DEAR (Drop Everything and Read). The benefits of such activities, which allow children to decide what they should be doing during a particular period, go beyond the development of reading skills.

This series, which has already gained wide acceptance over the years, is being re-issued in a more attractive format. Old favourites are being retained, but the range of titles is to be expanded to suit current interests and tastes. Texts have been carefully reviewed; it is intended that while these 'abridgments' should be faithful in spirit to the originals, children should be exposed to writing that is contemporary in style and idiom.

We hope that teachers, learners and their parents will find the new books even more useful and attractive than the ones they replace. The editors and publisher will be grateful for comments and suggestions. Meanwhile, to all young readers: *Happy Reading*!

Bikram K. Das
Series Editor

About the series

The *Orient Longman Easy Readers* aim to help children discover the joy of reading without feeling the constraints of a limited vocabulary. It is an encouraging experience for the child to be able to read what Michael West has called '...an enthralling approximation of the original'. The series tries to open up to the readers the world of old classics as well as modern writings, all within their grasp, as the language is simple and controlled.

The books are carefully graded into seven levels so that students progress gradually through successive grades with increasing ranges of vocabulary. There are seven levels in all beginning with 250-300 headwords in the first level to 3500–5000 headwords in level seven. In addition to the basic core vocabulary there are topic words, which along with difficult basic words are glossed on the pages in which they occur. The seven levels are meant for the age groups five to seven years at level one, and go up to twelve to fifteen years at level seven. Apart from lexical control, the books also use a structural grading system that is familiar to the readers. Even within each level, they are linguistically graded.

Although the books are simplified versions of original literary works, every effort has been made to preserve the author's individuality of style and opinion. The series hopes to bring to the readers a well-written story which will motivate them to go on reading and give them an opportunity to increase language awareness so that they will eventually be able to read and respond to the stylistics of unedited texts.

About the book

A good story brings enjoyment to the listener or reader and early people had long ago realised this. Scholars tell us that people began to tell stories as soon as they learnt to talk. And as language began to develop, what had begun as simple stories became great writings of the world. *Tales of Ancient India* is a collection of stories that have their origins in old myths and legends or heroic deeds or fables, as also stories that have grown along the periphery of great epics.

Shanta Rameshwar Rao is a well-known educationist and children's writer. Her other books for children include *The Children's Mahabharata*, a great favourite with children, *Seethu* and *The Bulbul's Ruby Nose Ring*.

She lives and works in Hyderabad, where she founded the Vidyaranya School.

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1 What makes an eclipse

Have you ever seen an eclipse of the sun or the moon? When there is an eclipse, a kind of darkness comes over the face of the sun or the moon. You learn from books on science that this darkness is the shadow of the earth falling upon the moon or the moon coming between the earth and the sun. But in ancient times people believed that the eclipse was the work of Rahu, a daitya. They believed that Rahu came often to swallow up the sun or the moon.

Even today, the eclipse is thought of as bad. Many people do not eat or do any important work at the time. And when the eclipse is over, many people bathe in tanks, rivers and seas.

Long, long ago, before there was the earth, before the stars or the sun or the moon shone in the sky, there was only emptiness. And in that emptiness there was an endless sea of milk. The white waves of the sea of milk rolled on as hundreds and thousands of years went by. A huge snake, Sesha, lay coiled on the sea of milk. Sesha's coils made

daitya: a demon

a great bed, and on this bed lay Vishnu. Vishnu had always been there, before the earth, the stars, sun or moon were born.

After thousands of years, Brahma came out of the body of Vishnu. Brahma was the god of creation. He created the seven worlds. He created the rishi Kashyapa and his two wives, Diti and Aditi. Rishis are learned and wise men, and they spend most of their time in prayer. They lead simple lives and live in forests. Kashyapa lived in the forest with his two wives, and after some years they had many sons. They sons of Diti were daityas or rakshasas, and the sons of Aditi were the gods or the devas. The daityas hated their half-brothers, the devas, and wanted to put an end to them. The devas in turn hated the daityas.

Then Brahma created all things—men, animals, trees and flowers, and fish and birds. But all these creatures did not live for ever. Death was always with them, and one day it would take them away. Death came to the people of the earth, the gods in heaven and the daityas. The devas did not want to die. They wanted to live for ever. They knew that deep under the sea of milk there was a

half-brother: a person's brother who has either the same father or mother but not both parents

golden bowl. There was amrita or the nectar of life in this golden bowl. If any created thing drank this amrita, it would live for ever. The devas wanted this amrita. But how could anyone get this golden bowl? The gods said: "Let us go to Vishnu and ask for his help."

About this time another rishi named Durvasa was travelling through the seven worlds. One day he came to the city of Indra, the god of the skies. Indra was a very rich god. He had many beautiful dancers in his palace. He had the best horses and elephants, and he rode on Airavata, the strongest and the wisest of elephants. He had a terrible weapon called the vajrayudha; when he wanted to kill an enemy, he threw it at him—it never missed its mark. Now all this riches went to his head and he thought that there was no one so powerful like him.

When Durvasa came into his city, Indra did not welcome or honour him. This made the rishi very angry. "You're strong and rich, O Indra, and in your pride you don't honour your guests. Don't you know, foolish little deva, that your riches will not stay with you for ever?" Indra only laughed and asked him

went to his head: made him proud

to go his way. This made the rishi even more angry. He cursed Indra: "All your riches, your palace and everything in your palace will go into the sea of milk."

At once all of Indra's riches, his horses, his army, Airavata and all the beautiful singers and dancers in his palace went crashing into the sea of milk. Indra was a beggar with only his clothes on. Indra fell on his knees and begged Durvasa to take back his curse, but the rishi turned and walked away. Indra was sorry for what he had done. He wanted to get back his riches. Only Vishnu could help him. He went to the other devas. With Indra at their head, the devas came to Vishnu. Vishnu listened to their prayers.

"Listen, devas," he said, "I'll tell you what to do. Go to the sea of milk. Churn it, as you churn milk to get butter out of it. It's very difficult work. It will take hundreds of years to churn the sea. Churn it with the mountain Mandara and the holy snake, Vasuki like a rope round Mandara. You cannot churn the sea of milk without the help of the daityas, your half-brothers. Ask for their help in this work. You hold the rope on one side with the daityas on the other side, and churn the sea

churn: shake the milk around with a quick movement to get butter

of milk. When you churn the sea, all the riches below will rise. And the golden bowl of amrita will rise too."

The devas went to the daityas, and asked them for their help. But the daityas said, "We'll come only if we too can have a drink of the amrita." The devas were afraid. They thought, "If the daityas drink of the amrita they'll never die. They'll grow strong and harm the people on the earth."

How were the devas going to churn the sea if the daityas were not going to help them? At last the devas said, "Very well then, you can have a drink of the amrita. Come and help us churn the sea." And secretly they planned not to give them any of the amrita.

The daityas believed the devas and went to help them. And together they churned the sea of milk. All the riches from the sea came rising up above the waves of milk, just as butter comes up when you churn milk. And Indra got back all his riches.

Last of all came the golden bowl of amrita. The devas and the daityas shouted for joy when they saw it. But soon they began to quarrel and fight. "What shall we do?" said the devas. "The daityas are strong and will defeat us." They begged Vishnu to come

once more to their help. Vishnu came. He took the form of a very beautiful woman, Mohini. Mohini laughed as she walked and she had a very sweet voice. She danced among them and as she danced, the bells on her feet jingled. And as the bells jingled, the hearts of all the daityas danced with her.

Mohini asked the devas to sit on one side and the daityas on the other. Then she took up the golden bowl of amrita and held it in her beautiful hands. The daityas did not know what was happening. They could only look at Mohini singing and dancing. They thought only of her beauty. And what was Mohini doing all this time? She was quietly giving all the amrita to the devas.

There was one daitya, Rahu; who was cleverer than the others. He saw what was happening and how Mohini was giving all the amrita to the devas and not a drop of it to his brothers. He also knew that Mohini was only Vishnu in disguise.

Rahu took the form of a deva and sat with them. He took his place between the two devas, the sun and the moon. He shone like a deva and no one knew him. Mohini did not look at Rahu closely and she gave him the amrita. At once Rahu lifted his head and

drank. He did not say his prayers as the devas did before he drank the amrita. He did not know this, he was only a daitya. Now the sun and the moon saw this and then they knew instantly that Rahu was a daitya. He had a shadow and the devas did not have shadows. Here was a daitya between them. Quickly they made a sign to Mohini. And quickly Mohini called to her help the wheel of Vishnu, the sudarshana chakra. Rahu was drinking the amrita, when the wheel came tearing through the sky and cut off his head. His head rolled away from his body, but both his head and his body came alive. They called the headless body Ketu and the head Rahu. Away went Rahu and Ketu moving round and round in the emptiness around the world.

Rahu and Ketu wanted to punish the sun and the moon. Sometimes you can see their dark forms in the sky moving slowly over the sun and the moon and there is an eclipse. Then people pray and Rahu and Ketu let go of these shining gods. Rahu and Ketu can never die. Again and again they come and darken the sun or the moon. And when they do that, they make the eclipses.

2 Why snakes have forked tongues

Have you ever looked at a snake closely? You will find it has a forked tongue. Here is a story—it tells you how the snake came by it.

You remember how the devas and the daityas churned the sea of milk, and how the devas had their drink of the amrita. Even after they drank the amrita, the devas found that there was more of it in the golden bowl. The devas carried away the golden bowl of amrita and put it on the highest mountain, safe from their enemies, the daityas. All round the bowl there was a high circle of fire burning night and day.

The bowl of amrita stood in the middle of a wheel which turned very fast. This wheel had two sharp swords which turned round and round with it. There were huge snakes near the wheel. The snakes breathed out fire from their mouths and burned what was near them. This is how the gods kept the golden bowl safe so that no one could reach it.

The sons of Diti wanted the amrita very badly. They put their mother in prison and

said to her, "We'll let you go free only if you get us the bowl of amrita."

In prison Diti thought for long, for she did not know how she could get the amrita. One day she thought of Garuda. Now Garuda was also Diti's son but he was not a daitya. Garuda, the eagle, had come out of a large egg. He had left his home and his mother and had gone to Vishnu, the god of gods and of all the world. Vishnu made Garuda his servant and Garuda carried Vishnu on his strong wings. When Diti thought of him, the great eagle flew down to her from out of the clouds and asked, "What do you want from me, Mother?" When he heard her, he said, "It's not easy to get the amrita." He then added, "I'll try all the same."

The fearless Garuda flew up the mountain. He felt the burning fire on his face and flew away. But he came back after drinking water from a thousand rivers. Then he put out the fires and flew towards the wheel. The wheel with the two sharp swords was turning round very fast. No one could stop it or pass through it. But Garuda changed his form. He changed into a small fly. Now he could go under the wheel and go near the golden bowl. When the snakes saw Garuda, they

lifted their heads to strike. But Garuda moved his wings up and down, making a great cloud of dust. The dust went into the eyes of the snakes and they could see nothing. Then quick as lightning, Garuda flew to the top of the mountain and brought away the golden bowl. Down he came to Diti and her sons, to hand over the bowl to them.

By then the gods knew that Garuda had taken away the bowl of amrita and they went after him. Garuda raced through the air on his strong wings and the devas soon lost him. He reached Diti at last and put the golden bowl on the earth, on the kusha grass. When the daityas saw it, they were happy and let their mother out of prison.

Before the daityas could drink the amrita from the bowl, the devas reached the place and there was fighting again between the devas and their half-brothers. While they fought, Indra quickly took the bowl and went away to heaven. Once again the daityas failed to drink the amrita, and now they knew that they could never escape death.

The gods went back to heaven and the daityas went away angry. The rich smell of the amrita was in the air. At night the snakes from under the earth came out and

smelt its sweetness. It was everywhere and it was strongest on the kusha grass. The snakes put out their tongues and licked the grass. There was no amrita on the grass. The blades of grass were sharp and they cut the tongues of the snakes. And that's why to this day snakes have forked tongues!

blade: a long narrow leaf of grass

3 Why the sea has waves

Very long ago, Indra, the king of the sky, was also the king of the world. He was very rich and had many cloud cattle. These cloud cattle moved freely over the sky and brought rain to the earth below. Rivers full of water flowed through the lands. Fields of rice and wheat drank the cool, sweet rain and gave food to the people and the people were happy. The gods were happy too.

There lived in a dark, big mountain fortress a fearful daitya. His name was Vritra and he was the demon of famine. This daitya brought famine to the people. He did not like it when others were happy. Vritra was a very bad and cunning daitya. He stole Indra's cloud cattle and drove them to his mountain and shut them up in his fortress.

Now there were no cloud cattle in the sky and so there was no rain. The rice and wheat fields dried up. The rivers were dry. People had no food and no water. There was famine in the land. They fell on their knees and prayed to the devas for help. They

famine: a time when there is no food

begged Indra to send rain and save them.

Indra heard their prayers and got up from his throne. He said: "I will put this daitya in his place. I will kill him and bring away my cloud cattle from the fortress." Then he rode to the mountain with a strong army, but he could not defeat Vritra. Vritra was a strong daitya indeed! Even Airavata, Indra's elephant, could not push the huge doors of the fortress open and let the cloud cattle out. Vritra sat on top of the mountain and laughted at Indra and his army. Indra was angry. He turned back and rode away.

He prayed to Brahma, the creator of all things. Brahma said to Indra: "Go to the earth and ask the help of the wise old rishis. Only they can tell you the secret of Vritra's strength." Indra came down to the earth and went to the rishis. The rishis who were wise listened to Indra's story. They sat in deep and silent thought. Then slowly came the answer: "It's not easy to kill Vritra. Only one weapon can kill him and that is the vajrayudha."

"What is this vajrayudha?" asked Indra. "Where will I get it?"

"You can make the vajrayudha only out of the bones of a great rishi," said the rishis. The people heard these words and they were

very sad. Where could they find such a weapon? How could they ask any rishi for his bones? If they did not get this weapon they would not be able to defeat Vritra. There would be no rain and they would all die of hunger and thirst. These were their thoughts and they were very sad.

Then Dadhichi, the oldest and the wisest of the rishis spoke: "Do not be sad my children, I'll give my life for you. You can take my bones and make the vajrayudha. The great Indra can kill Vritra with it. He'll bring rain to you all and save you." The people lifted up their hands at the goodness of this rishi and sang his praises.

And true to his word, Dadhichi gave up his life. After his death they burned his body and took out the bones. They carried the bones to Twashtri. Twashtri made weapons for the devas. He made the vajrayudha out of Dadhichi's bones and gave it to Indra. Whenever Indra wanted to kill his enemy, he could throw it at him. It never missed its mark, it always killed the enemy and it came back to Indra.

And with this vajrayudha Indra went to fight Vritra. When Vritra saw the vajrayudha in Indra's hand, he was afraid. Indra cried

out, "Come, O Vritra, come and fight now." But Vritra hid in fear in his fortress. Then Indra threw the weapon at him. It crashed through the walls of the fortress and killed Vritra. Indra's army entered the fortress, threw open its doors and let the cattle out. The cloud cattle were once again free to go about the sky. They sent down the rain again. The smiling people of the land lifted their heads up and thanked Indra. They were free from hunger and thirst now.

Vritra's defeat brought fear to every daitya's heart. The daityas ran everywhere. Indra's army killed some of them. They rushed up to the skies and the devas drove them away from there. They rushed down to the land of men and Indra's men drove them from there. At last they ran to the sea and hid there under the water. There at last the daityas were safe and there have they stayed ever since, deep under the sea.

They never forgot their defeat. Their anger made them kick the water up and when they did that the waves rushed out. And under the sea, men say, the daityas live, even now. In their anger and jealousy, they kick up the water and make it rise high and flow over its sandy banks. And that is what make the waves of the sea.

4 How the stork got his long neck

Ram the Prince of Ayodhya and his brother Lakshman were walking through the forest of Dandaka in search of the lost Sita when they saw a stork near a pond. The stork was standing there on one leg. He was catching fish. The brothers went up to him and asked him: "Did you see Princess Sita? Can you tell us which way she went?"

But this stork was a very ill-mannered bird. He held the fish in his beak and closed his eyes. Soon the fish went down his neck and into his stomach.

Then Ram asked him again, "Speak, O water bird, I have walked far and wide through the forest in search of my wife. My heart will break if I don't find her. She's more to me than my life. My brother and I have walked over stones and thorns in the forest. Our mouths are dry. We're both thirsty and hungry and very tired. No one can tell us about her. O stork, we beg you, tell us— Have you seen Sita?"

The stork replied: "Humph! Leave me alone,"

great fear. Lakshman found him and pulled him out of his hiding place. The poor servant joined his two hands together and begged Lakshman. "Lord, be kind to me. Please let me go." But Lakshman only laughed and lifted his sword.

"Oh, don't, don't kill him!" cried his wife and children. "O prince, in the name of Ram, we beg you."

"Ram, Ram!" they cried.

"Stop!" came Ram's voice. "Who calls my name?" And there was Ram himself, holding back Lakshman's arm. The wife fell on her knees and cried, "Lord Ram, help us!"

Ram's face softened with pity. He put his hand upon his brother's shoulder. "Put away your sword, my brother," he said, "don't kill him. They beg me and I will not turn down their prayers."

The sword fell from Lakshman's hand when Ram spoke. The servant and his wife and children at once changed into five small green parrots. They fell at Ram's feet; their tears washed his feet. They were tears of thankfulness.

Ram picked up the birds and held them close to him. "Fly away and live in the green

trees of the forest. Sing my name all day." He held them out and they flew away.

And to this day the parrots call the name of "Ram", remembering the dark day of the battle and remembering how Ram saved the life of a servant.

7 The story of the Pole Star

Far in the northern sky shines the Pole Star. It shows where the North Pole of the earth is. The other stars in the sky change places. But the Pole Star shines in the same place. The light of the Pole Star helps travellers and seamen to find their way in deserts and on the wide seas. We in India call the Pole Star, the Dhruva Nakshatra.

Long, long ago King Uttanapada ruled our country. Suniti was his gentle queen, and they had a dear little son, Dhruva. He was the joy of Uttanapada's heart. But their happy days were not many. The king saw a very beautiful woman called Suruchi and married her. Suruchi wanted to be queen. She did not like Suniti or the little prince Dhruva. Suruchi told the king many lies about Suniti and the child Dhruva. When Suruchi had a son, she disliked Dhruva more than ever.

"They'll make Dhruva the king one day, and not my son," she thought. So great was the king's love for Suruchi, that he could not say no to what she wanted. "Send them

Pole Star: the star which shines above the North Pole

away from the palace," Suruchi ordered and soon the king sent Suniti and their small son far away into the forest. Suruchi was the queen now and she was very happy.

Suniti and Dhruva lived in a little hut in the forest. A little further away from them were some small huts where some holy men lived. The little prince Dhruva grew up in the forest with beautiful trees and mountains around him. He was a happy, healthy child full of the joy of life, and the holy men of the forest loved him and taught him his first lessons.

One day the child asked his mother about his father. "Mother, all my friends have fathers. Where is my father?" Suniti bent her head in sorrow. Then in a low and gentle voice she told him about his father Uttanapada. When she finished the little boy's face was bright and happy. "O Mother, I want to go to my father's country and see him," he begged.

Suniti was afraid for her son. She did not want him to go from her on a long journey. What if he came to some harm, she thought. But the child begged her and she did not have the heart to say no to her son. And the boy only wanted to see his father. Suniti

dressed him in the rich clothes of a prince and sent him to the king's city with one of the holy men of the forest.

When the little prince was in the town, his eyes grew round with wonder. He had never seen such big houses or wide streets and the people in them. It was all very different from his life in the forest. At last he came to the palace, his own father's palace. It was very beautiful, there were flowers in the garden. Dhruva looked at all this, but he wanted to see his father most of all.

He told the king's men at the gate, "I'm Dhruva, I want to see my father." They took him to the king. "Here's Prince Dhruva," they said.

The king looked at his son and his heart filled with joy. Dhruva had been only a baby when he had left the palace for the forest. Now he was a little prince. He lifted the child on to his knee and kissed him.

Suruchi came into the room. She saw the boy on her husband's knee and knew at once that it was Dhruva. In an angry voice she said to the boy: "What are you doing here? Your home is in the forest. Get off the king's lap at once. Only my son can sit on his lap." The child looked at his father, but

the king was a foolish old man: he could never go against Suruchi's wishes. He saw that Suruchi did not like it, and he slowly put Dhruva down. "Go back to the forest," Queen Suruchi said to the child, "nobody wants you here."

The queen's words hurt Dhruva. He looked at his father but the old king turned his face away. No one said a kind word to him or smiled. He stood there, a little boy, alone and unhappy in the great palace.

Slowly he walked out of the palace. The holy man from the forest was waiting for him outside the palace. All the way home, Dhruva did not talk, but when he saw his mother at home, he cried out his story to her.

The mother tried to make her son less unhappy. She said: "You have another, a greater Father, my child, and He loves you. He is greater than any king on earth and more loving than any father."

The child heard this: his cheeks were wet with tears. "Where is he, Mother?" he asked.

She told him, "He is Vishnu. He is God and we're his children." The little boy became thoughtful; his eyes turned bright. "Mother, I'll find this Father, Vishnu, then," he said.

His mother smiled sadly and said, "Yes, my son, some day when you're old and wise, you can look for God and find Him."

But the little boy cried: "Oh no, Mother! I want to find Him now. I can't wait." His mother told him: "Greater and wiser men don't find Vishnu, even after many years of prayer. It's not easy for you. You're only a child." And she gave him toys and sweets. But he did not want toys and sweets, he wanted only to see Vishnu.

The next morning he left home and went to the holy men. "Where is Vishnu, O wise ones? Show me the way to our Father, Vishnu, I want to see Him now."

They said to him: "Little boy, you're very young. When you're old and wise you can see Him."

"I want to go to Him now. I want to know His love!" cried the boy.

He went deep into the forest. It was thick with trees and very dark. The little boy was not afraid, and did not stop. Fearsome animals like tigers, lions and snakes turned away when they saw the little boy. He was a simple little boy full of the thought of God.

fearsome: causing fear

And none of the animals did him any harm. He cried out: "O Vishnu, Vishnu, where are You? Take me to You."

At last Narada, one of the holy ones in heaven, came down to him. He showed him how to pray to Vishnu. Dhruva sat upon a large stone. He closed his eyes and fixed all his thoughts upon Vishnu.

Then Vishnu came before him in all His brightness. The boy smiled—he could see Vishnu at last. How beautiful He looked! There was great love in Vishnu's face. He said, "You've seen me, my son. Ask me what you want and I'll give it to you." But Dhruva's heart was full of love for Vishnu and he did not ask for anything.

Then Vishnu said, "Shine as a star high in the sky. Shine there for ever. Let people see your beauty and brightness and remember your great love for me." And Vishnu changed him into a star.

8 How thunder and lightning were made

Once upon a time there was a beautiful girl in a village. Her hair was long and black, her eyes were bright and her skin was golden. All the boys of the village loved her and wanted to marry her. She ran away when they came near her and she laughed at them as she ran. No one could catch her when she ran as she was very fast on her feet.

In the same village there was a young man called Lakshman and he too thought her very beautiful. He loved the girl more than his life. He went to her father's house and begged him for his daughter's hand in marriage. The father told him: "If you work in my house for twelve years, you may marry my daughter." Lakshman's love for her was very great and he worked as a servant in their house.

Twelve years went by, and at the end of that time Lakshman came to his master and said: "I have worked in your house for twelve years, master. You promised me my present and now I want to go home with it."

His master brought out a big pot from the house. It had a lid and the lid was tight.

"Take this, my son," he said, "open it only when you reach home. Do as I tell you—as you did all these years. You'll then get your present. And all will be well."

Happily Lakshman took the pot from his master and started his journey home. He carried the pot on his head.

It was a long journey through the forest; Lakshman was alone and he wanted to come to the end of his journey soon. He wanted very much to take the lid off from the pot and look inside. Then he remembered his promise and walked on. "I'll be home before it grows dark. Then I can open the pot. For twelve years I did what my master wanted; I'll do the same now," he said to himself.

And he walked on. The sun was high in the sky and Lakshman felt hot and tired. He felt the pot getting more and more heavy with each step. He thought he heard some sounds coming from inside the pot, and he wished and wished that he could open the lid and look inside. "What is in the pot? Could it be my master's daughter, the girl of my life? But no, my master has asked me

not to look into the pot. I'll be home soon and I'll know then."

Now he walked fast in the forest. He looked at the little birds and squirrels as he walked; he wanted to forget about the pot. But it was on his head! It was heavy. "My master's beautiful daughter is inside it, I think."

It began to get dark. "A hundred steps more and I'll be home. Can't I take a quick look? One little look will do no harm," he thought. "I'll put the lid back at once." He sat on a stone and put the pot down before him. He thought he heard the girl laugh. It was soft and sweet. It came from inside the pot. His heart beat very fast.

"I'll open it. One quick look...." and Lakshman opened the lid on the pot a little. When he did that, it flew up and hit him in the face. For a second he shut his eyes; when he opened his eyes he saw the shining shape of a girl shooting up into the sky. She flashed brightly into the sky, far away from him, out of his reach. He had done what his master had asked him not to and he had lost her forever.

flash: shine

"Come back, come back!" he cried alone in the forest. Then he shot arrows after arrow into the sky. The arrows crashed through the clouds. The girl only laughed and showed her shining white teeth and flashed through the clouds in lines of gold.

"Listen to the thunder," people say on a stormy night. "That's the crash of Lakshman's arrows. See that bright golden line flashing through the clouds—that's his master's lovely daughter!"

She is as beautiful as ever and no one can catch her. When she flashes across the sky, you can hear the thunder of Lakshman's arrows—the arrows that can never reach his lost bride.

stormy: when there is thunder and lightning

9 Cock Sparrow and Hen Sparrow

Cock Sparrow and Hen Sparrow lived in a warm little nest in the roof of a house. Hen Sparrow worked hard. She kept the nest neat and beautiful. She cooked and she washed. She worked all day. She could not look beautiful—she had no time, even to look at herself in the mirror. She had so much work! Her husband Cock Sparrow was a lazy, happy bird. He slept late and did no work.

Then something happened. All of Hen Sparrow's friends came to her house to see her. They said, "She'll get pretty babies soon." They brought her sweets and flowers and little presents. She looked into the mirror. She looked beautiful indeed! Oh dear, she did not have one thing and that was kajal. Kajal makes the eyes look beautiful. Hen Sparrow did not have any kajal; not one of her friends had brought it for her.

She turned to her husband and said, "Get me some kajal if you want me to look beautiful."

"Very well, my dear," Cock Sparrow said, "where can I find it? Please tell me."

Hen Sparrow answered: "Ask for some kajal from Darkness of Night. Get up early tomorrow and catch Darkness before he leaves."

"Very well, my dear," said Cock Sparrow. He thought, "It's only for once and I'll get up early, before Darkness leaves." The next morning it was very cold outside and his bed was warm—he did not get up. His wife called him loud and long. Cock Sparrow only put his head deep under his wing and went off to sleep again. Hen Sparrow saw that it was no use and went back to her work.

When at last Cock Sparrow woke up Darkness was not there, and he could not get any kajal for his wife. He said to her, "I'll get up very early tomorrow and get you some kajal." Again he slept late the next morning and again he could not get any kajal for his wife.

Hen Sparrow was sad. Her husband too was sad. Hen Sparrow thought and thought. She was a clever little sparrow, and she thought of Black Koel of the Hills. Hen Sparrow said: "You will never be able to get up early and catch Darkness. Now listen. Far away in the hills lives Black Koel and he has black kajal on his wings. You can get it from him."

Away flew Cock Sparrow to the hills. Black Koel was not there. He asked the hills and trees and the rivers. They said, "You'll find him here only about the month of June when the soft, cool winds blow. He sings ever so sweetly then."

Back flew Cock Sparrow to his nest. The two sparrows waited in the nest for the month of June. At last the month of June came. The soft, cool winds were blowing now. There were flowers all over. The birds sang new songs.

"It's time for the Koel now," Hen Sparrow said to her husband, "go at once. Soon our little ones will come out of the eggs. I want to have the kajal before that."

"Like lightning I'll go, my dear," said Cock Sparrow and flew away. He came to the hills.

"Koo-ooo! Koo-oo!" said the Koel. "I'll give the kajal for your wife. You can take it from my black wing. You can put it in a bottle and take it home."

The stupid Cock Sparrow had no bottle with him. "Dear me!" said the Koel, "Can't you fly back and get it?"

"Oh no, no, no!" cried Cock Sparrow, "My wife will not wait."

"I can help you, don't worry. You can do one thing. You can take some kajal on your chest and some on your wings," said the clever Koel. And he put some kajal on Cock Sparrow's wings and chest. Cock Sparrow thanked him and flew happily away.

That evening Hen Sparrow put on her best dress. She put some black kajal on her eyes. She looked very beautiful indeed, with her large bright eyes! Cock Sparrow fell in love with her again.

Hen Sparrow looked at her husband. "Now, What's this? Some of the black is on your coat. Wait, I'll wash it for you." Hen Sparrow could never find time—she could not wash away the black from the coat, she had lots of work in the house. And some black kajal stayed on his coat.

"You look very handsome, my dear, with the black on your coat. I want you to always wear this coat," said Hen Sparrow.

And Cock Sparrow never changed that coat—his wife had asked him not to.

All other Cock Sparrows too wanted to please their wives and wanted to look handsome. And they too put black kajal on their coats. And that is how they have some black on their wings and on their chests.

Chapter 1

As you read

1. Describe the family of Kashyapa.
2. Why did the devas went the golden bowl?
3. What kind of a god was Indra?
4. How did Durvasa punish Indra for his pride?
5. What advise did Vishnu give Indra and the devas?
6. How did Mohini fool the daityas.

Looking at language

Find the opposites of the following words.

strong	before
always	creation
wise	hated
beautiful	clever

Developing your reading

A. Was it right of the devas to get the help of the daityas and then not give them the amrita? Discuss this with your friends and teacher in class.

B. Find out what else people do during an eclipse.

Chapter 2

As you read

1. How did the gods keep the bowl safe?
2. Why was Garuda fearless?
3. Why did the daityas want the amrita?
4. Why do snakes have forked tongues?
5. How did Garuda make use of his wings?

Looking at language

1. Mention some things which have a 'rich smell'.
2. What are the things which can 'race through the air'?
3. To this, day ..... (complete the sentence)
4. Give another word for 'under the earth'. The word begins with b .....
5. Make a sentence with 'quick as lighting'.

Developing your reading

A. Do you think Garuda was clever? Give reasons for your answer.

B. Was Garuda a better son that the daityas? Why do you think so?

Chapter 3

As you read

1. How did the cloud cattle make people happy?
2, What happened when the cloud cattle were stolen?
3. Why did Indra ride away from the daitya's fortress?
4. How did the people get the vajrayudha?
5. Why did the daityas hide under the sky?
6. What, does the story tell you causes the waves of the sea?

Looking at language

Fill in the blanks with appropriate adjectives.

1. The daityas were ..... and .....
2. The people prayed to the gods who were .....
3. Airavata was a ..... elephant.
4. The advice given by the rishis was .....
5. The vajrayudha was .....

Developing your reading

A. Discuss other possible reasons why the sea has waves.

B. Why is there so much fighting even in god's kingdom? Share your answers with the class.

Chapter 4

As you read

1. What was the condition of the brothers when they were looking for Sita?
2. Why according to the story does the stork have a long neck?
3. Why was Lakshman angry?

Looking at language

A. Make sentence of your own with these phrases.
   1. my heart will break
   2. truly ashamed of his word

B. Underline the correct word from the choices given.
   1. The brothers were waiting in/through the forest.
   2. Soon the food went down/into his neck and down/into his stomach.
   3. The children did not walk through/on the insects in the garden.
   4. The man pulled up/down the bananas from the tree.

Developing your reading

Discuss with your teacher and friends if Lakshman could have treated the stork differently.

Chapter 5

As you read

1. How did Ram come to know where Sita was?
2. How was Ram's army to cross the sea?
3. Why was it difficult to make the bridge?
4. The monkeys were mean to the squirrel. How do you know?

Looking at language

Think of more expressions with the word 'heart'. Two examples are given in the book. 'my heart cries out'; 'touches my heart'.

Developing your reading

What have you learnt from the story of the squirrel? Discuss this with your teacher and friends in class.

Chapter 6

As you read

1. Why was Lakshman angry?
2. Why did Lakshman laugh when the servant begged him?
3. Why did Ram ask Lakshman not to kill the man and his family?

Looking at language

A. In the expression *cut off*, the world *cut* is a verb. Think of other words that can be used instead of cut.
Example: switch off.

B. *Hold back* is an expression. What all can you hold back?

Chapter 7

As you read

1. Why were Suniti and Dhruva sent away?
2. How was Dhruva treated by his father when he reached the palace?
3. How did Dhruva find Vishnu?
4. Why was Dhruva changed into a Pole Star?

Looking at language

Complete these sentences.

1. as beautiful as .....
2 as foolish as .....
3. as happy as .....
4. as bright as .....
5. as sad as .....

Developing your reading

A. What was Dhruva's childhood like?

B. In the story whose fault was it, the king's or Suniti's?

Chapter 8

As you read

1. How do you know that Lakshman loved the girl a lot?
2. Describe Lakshman's journey through the forest?
3. What are thunder and lightning in the story?
4. What did the master want to test?

Looking at language

Fill in the blanks with appropriate verbs.

1. The girls were happy so they decided to .....
2. He was asked to ..... the box as soon as he'd seen it.
3. The arrows would not ..... back after they had been shot.
4. You can see his shining teeth when he .....

Developing your reading

A. Was the master a wise man?

B. Do you like the explanation for thunder and lightning? Do you know any other similar story?

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Chapter 9

As you read

1. How do you know the Hen Sparrow was hardworking?
2. Why couldn't the Cock Sparrow get kajal?
3. Why does the cock sparrow have a black coat?

Looking at language

Complete these sentences.

1. She had so much work that .....
2. The cock was so lazy that .....
3. The hen looked so beautiful that .....
4. The cock was so stupid that .....

Developing your reading

Who is the cleverer of the two—the Cock Sparrow or the Hen Sparrow? Why do you think so?

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